

Leading in the Footsteps of Jesus

Part 2: How to Lead While Following Jesus

Matthew 23:1-12

David Delk

Good morning men. It's a great day to be here with you. Turn to Matthew 23. We will continue this series "Leading in the Footsteps of Jesus." We will do Part 2 today. We will talk about how to lead. Last week we talked about what leadership is and why it matters. Today we will talk about how we actually lead so we can have the kind of impact God wants us to have. Matthew 23:1-12.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

May God add understanding to the reading of His holy Word. Last week we talked about why leadership matters and how God has wired the universe so leadership has an impact. In Jeremiah 23 we saw the people of Israel judged because of their leaders.

We talked about the idea of representation. Woven into the fabric of creation is this representative nature of the world. Adam can represent us so when Adam falls we fall. Jesus can represent us if we put our faith and trust in Him, because His righteousness can become our righteousness.

In the same way, leadership and leaders have a representative function for those they are leading. There are consequences to being a leader. There are consequences to being a leader in your family. If you lead well, there are certain consequences that come from that. If you lead poorly, there are certain consequences that come from that. There are consequences to being a leader in your workplace. We see this in the headlines every day. There are consequences in being a leader in politics, friendships, other relationships or in your church. Leadership matters. We saw in Jeremiah there was a promise of a true leader that was to come; a branch from Jesse that would reunite God's people and be the ultimate Leader with a capital "L" that none of us

could be, and that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Then we talked about leadership itself briefly. We came up with a definition of leadership. Lovingly influencing people to pursue God's vision. Remember this? Can you do the motions with me? Lovingly influencing people to pursue God's vision. That is a definition we came up with for leadership. That is what we are trying to accomplish in our relationships.

We think about real life and the pressures of it. A teenager who breaks curfew. A project that is going south at work, and people can't agree on the right direction or way to fix it. A neighbor that continually is harassing you and doing all kinds of things to make your life miserable. Situations at church where people are disappointed, frustrated, and disagreeing. It is one thing to talk about leadership in an ivory tower, but it is another thing to say, how do I actually do this? A lot of you will walk out of here today to marriages that are not going the way you wish they were. You will walk out of here to difficult situations with children. Maybe you will walk out of here with health situations, you don't know what direction to go, you have five different people telling you five different things, and you don't have any idea where to move. You will walk out of here to financial challenges where you do not have enough coming in to pay for everything going out. How do we lead in the midst of real life? That is what we will look at this morning.

We will talk about it from this passage we just read from Matthew 23. Leading and following feels like contradictions. We are supposed to lead, yet follow Jesus. Leadership in our culture is talked about in terms of being a visionary, being demanding, being a perfectionist, inspiring people, being hard working, determined, stubborn, all these kinds of characteristics of leadership and yet, how do we implement any of those things in the context of following Jesus Christ?

I was talking to some folks about leadership yesterday, getting their opinions on what makes a good leader. I'd like to do the same thing this morning. What is a key quality you would look for in a leader? Being a servant. Accountability. Consistency. Leading by example. Integrity. Courage. Humility. A good listener. Sacrifice. Competence. That is a great list. Does anybody want to raise their hand and say you are all those things this morning? I don't know about you, but when I hear about that list, I get a little depressed about that leader. I am supposed to be competent, a good listener, a servant, full of integrity, courageous. I just want to make it through the day. I just want to make it until I go to sleep tonight. What is all this? There is this tension because we know there is an ideal of leadership that we don't meet. Yet, God places us in positions where we are supposed to lead.

Today, I want to look at this passage and see how it defines leadership. But first, I want to give us an image to work from. We talked about an image of a cable car or gondola ski-lift briefly last week. When you are in one of these cable cars the only thing you see is the cable car. You are sitting in there and you can see a little bit of the supports and wires but basically you see the car. That is all you know about. But that car is completely dependent on the power of the motors in the gears that are in the terminal station.

A couple of years ago our parents took our extended family on a cruise in Alaska for their 50th anniversary. We had a couple of days beforehand and we drove up to Whistler. One of the things they had there was a peak-to-peak gondola that is the world's largest unsupported span.

It is 1.88 miles that are unsupported. When you are in that thing, this is the view you get looking out in front of you.

I didn't actually get to go on that part. My mom had an issue so I took her back to see a dentist. I'm scared of heights. But my brother is terrified of heights. I was looking forward to going on this thing just to see him. It has a glass bottom. I just wanted to see him. That is what I was looking forward to.

I was up at Chimney Rock in North Carolina and I decided fear of heights was incredibly smart. Why are people saying fear of heights is a bad thing? This is a good thing. Anybody ought to be afraid of being hundreds of feet up in the air with nothing underneath you. You know what they say about gravity – there is no going back. Once it takes effect that is it. I decided a healthy fear of heights is a good thing at that point.

1.88 miles unsupported. Why does that work? The only way it works is because of the terminal station that gears the motors the power support that those things are providing to the gondola. In the same way, when we think about leadership it is not about us. We are important. You can't ride a gondola lift without a car to get in. You have to get in something. It is being carried along because of the power being provided to it. In the same way, in our leadership it is not primarily about us, there are people God attached to us and our family, friendships, workplace and churches. They are in the car with us, but the real thing that is going to determine our leadership is whether or not we are connected to the power and whether or not Christ is providing for us.

WHAT A TRUE LEADER DOESN'T DO

Let's look at two things from this passage that a true leader doesn't do. The first thing I want us to see is a true leader does not control others. Jesus said, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you." The religious things at that time were seeking to control those people. Jesus was consistently talking about the damage that kind of an attitude brought to the hearts and lives of people. We know that happens in religious situations because the leaders were setting down rules and they were trying to tell everyone exactly what to do and trying to be the conscience for every person. They believe they had the answer to all these things and my way is the way it has to be done. That is what has to be done. Of course we see our share of that in our culture. If I just check off all these boxes, I am a good man. A lot of that was going on for hundreds of years in our western culture, even inside of Christianity.

You know it is not just that context it is also the way we relate to anybody in terms of controlling. I think about a lot of men for example, and some of you in the room would fit this category, it is very difficult when your family or your wife makes you late. What do you do? We try to control them. We are helping them get ready a little earlier, waking them up a little earlier. I know the alarm is set later, but maybe we should go ahead and get started. Finally, five minutes before we leave the shouting begins, and the kids are getting on your nerves. Some of you have young kids and they are exuberant, and stay exuberant, long past your tolerance of exuberance has expired. And they are running or screaming and picking on each other. Finally,

you say stop that and finally explode. Why? Because you want to control. You want to stop something.

Think about the business world. A lot of us try to set up our agenda, our environment in a way we get things done the way we want them done. These people take care of these things and I didn't ask for that to be put on my calendar. Why do I have this going on? I don't want to talk to that person, why did you let that call through? We end up trying to control our environment. All of us are tempted to this.

The second thing we see in this passage is they seek their own benefit. "Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long [Matthew 23:3-5]". A phylactery is a little leather box that they would put Scriptures in, and they would tie it on their arm or on their forehead from the passage in Deuteronomy that says let the Scriptures always be on your forehead. What He is saying is they are not satisfied with just a normal everyday phylactery. They want extra wide phylacteries and long tassels because they want everyone to see how holy they are. "They love a place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplace and to have people call them 'Rabbi.' [Matthew 23:6-7]" They were looking out for their own self interest. They were looking for their own benefit.

I think about how often that happens to me and how I get in that trap. I think about when they want people to call them Rabbi. I've been involved in men's discipleship for 20 years. Sometimes it is easy to say I could have done a lot of things; I chose to do this and I don't have any regrets, I love it, but I'd like to get a little respect. I'd like for someone to recognize this. Have you all felt that way? You think about your kids. I've put 15 or 20 years into this and this is the respect I get and this is what I am hearing? Some of you are nodding your heads and maybe this is last night. Maybe we want a promotion at work. Maybe we need more money, or maybe we can get a new car, or have more people recognize what we have done, or get our agenda to be accomplished. We are manipulating and working the situation because we want these things for ourselves. All of us can fall into that trap as men and as leaders.

WHY WE ARE TEMPTED TO CONTROL

I want us to think about that for a few minutes because it is important that we realize why we are tempted to control or focused on our self-interest. Why are we tempted to control others? You may be able to add to this list but one thing I think of is fear. I am afraid if things don't work out the way I think things should work out.

If we are late then I am afraid of the consequences. I'm afraid that people will look at us as the people who come in late to the church service, or people who are not of their word or value people's time, or rude or whatever. I am afraid of the consequences of this. Related to that is a lack of faith. God, I can't trust You to work this situation out, so I am going to take this into my hands and I will make this situation work out to what I want it to. Because I don't really believe that if You have it in Your hands that everything is going to be okay. We end up wanting to take control. We have overconfidence in our own ability. We trust ourselves more than God. We

believe we have the right agenda; that we know the best outcome; that we know how this thing should work so we will fight to make that happen.

I am not suggesting we shouldn't strive to see certain results and I am not saying we should not work hard to get things done. But there is a line we cross, and admittedly it is a subjective line, where you go from working hard at something to an idol you want something to happen exactly the way you want it. When we cross the line, we can no longer be the leader to lovingly influence people to pursue God's vision because we started to control and we try to make things fit our agenda.

WHY WE ARE SELF-ORIENTED

Why do we end up being self-oriented? A lot of times it is as simple as thinking getting what we want brings happiness. I have this idea this is what I want to have and if I can get it I'll be happy. We can prove this to be false with almost the same certainty that we can prove that $2+3=4$ is false. $2+3=4$ is self-evidently false. Let's take a look at this statement up here. If I get what I want I will be happy.

Let's think about the evidence we have in our culture today. How many people do we know and see in the news who got what they wanted and they are not happy. Our world is overflowing with examples of people who got what they wanted and didn't end up happy. We have seen that in our own lives where we have been seeking after something and we thought we wanted and needed it, we thought it would satisfy us and God says okay, you can have it. We get it and we realize it was a disaster. We realize it is not the thing that will bring us satisfaction, joy and happiness.

Another reason we are self-oriented is we believe that we have to look out for ourselves because no one else will. Some of us have been influenced by our family situations. A lot of you may not have had dads or moms that cared for you. The lesson you heard growing up is you better look out for number one, because nobody else is going to do it. When we bring that into our adult lives and into our relationships and leadership, we come off as being self-oriented because we think we have to take care of ourselves because nobody else is going to do it.

Another reason we end up being self-oriented is we don't really worship and trust Jesus. We don't really think He has our best interest at heart. We may be committed to him and we may believe in his teachings and believe He is going to get us to heaven not so much. Jesus and having a really good marriage. Or Jesus and having kids that get good grades and go to good colleges. Or Jesus and a successful career. That would make me happy. I am all for that. But Jesus by Himself? I don't know. Yet, that is what the essence of the gospel is that Jesus is enough.

That is what Jesus is trying to stress in the passage when He goes on to talk about what true leaders do in the rest of the passage. "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ [Matthew 23:9-10]". What Jesus is saying there is probably trying to use hyperbole. I don't think it is inappropriate to call your earthly father, dad or father. I think what Jesus is

saying here is He is trying to speak against the religious culture of elevating these people above everyone else, and controlling everyone else. He says you need to worship God alone. You only have one Master. None of you is master. There is only the one. If He was going to put this in the context of today's world is don't call anyone CEO. There is only one CEO. Don't call anybody lead director. Chairman of the Board. Principal. Whatever words you want to use, there is only one. Don't call anyone president – there is only one president. What He means is that we ought to be submitting to God and Christ with our lives and hearts.

One of the things that leaders do is submit to Christ. That is hard for a lot of men to do today. We are told to take the bull by the horns. We are told to make it happen, pull ourselves up by the bootstraps. If it is to be, it is up to me. If I believe I can achieve it. Your third grade civics teacher told you in America anybody can be president. It helps to have 100 millions dollars in the bank, but anybody can be president in America. We have this mythology of I have to make this happen, yet the Scriptures are saying you need to submit to the true master and recognize who the real teacher is. You need to understand who the real rabbi is and to submit to him. We are supposed to be active, we are supposed to be good stewards and good workers but we do it as men under authority. When I think about my family life and leadership there I am supposed to invest in my kids. I am supposed to invest in my wife and pray with her and lead her and love her. But I am supposed to do it as a person who is representing Christ and submitted to Christ. Not because I am going to have an impact on them or transform them, but because I am representing Jesus.

Let me give you a practical step today. You are going to leave here and have a meeting at the office. You will have a customer service call. You will work on a project with somebody. Here is what you do. Talk to your kids and wife tonight imagine Jesus is right there with you and He is with you. He is the president of the company. He is the project manager of your project. He is the one who is really parenting your kids. He is the one who is really being a husband to your wife. Imagine as you sit down some time today, one of the calls or conversations you have today I want you to think about Jesus sitting beside you sitting there as your leader. The reason I want you to do that is He really is. Through the power of the Holy Spirit He really is in every one of those situations. We need to recognize that and submit to that moment by moment. That is one of the things a true leader does.

After that submission the second thing a leader does is serve others. When you think about the answers we have to good leadership we can go back to the great commandment Jesus gave. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. A person who does that is going to be a true leader. People want to know you love them. People want to know you are for them. They want to see you working for their good. They want them to serve them and help them be everything God wants them to be.

WHAT A TRUE LEADER DOES

So Jesus says the greatest among you will be your servant. This is the paradox of the gospel. We find our lives by losing them. Every man has to come to the place where you either believe that or not. You either believe by abandoning your agenda, by abandoning what you think is the right way to go, and the things you need, and say I submit myself to Jesus Christ. I admit He knows more than I do. I admit that He is the one who is really in control. We want control, but who is

really in control? Jesus. You can work out all the time, you can have all the life insurance, you can have the safest car in the world, you can eat vegetarian and take all kinds of supplements and the next second your heart can stop. There is absolutely nothing you can do about it.

You can put in a security system at your house; you can put in a six foot fence with razor wire on top of it. You can have laser motion detectors. You can watch all the cameras on your smart phone, and a little electrical spark in an outlet happens today, and the whole place will go up. There is absolutely nothing you can do about it. You have the illusion of control. We don't have control. We are never going to have control. We need to admit it and submit to Christ. When we do that then we have the freedom to serve and love others because we are no longer trying to manage things for themselves. When I really experience the love of Christ it frees me from having to look out for myself.

You probably have met leaders who think like that. It is really refreshing. A few years ago our staff went to Reformed Theological Seminary. We do a prayer day there. We used one of the conference rooms and we gathered just to get out of the office and we spent half a day out of the office praying for needs people sent to the ministry, and projects. We do it twice a year. We were over there and usually, we have done it many times now, we just go and do our deal and leave. We don't see anyone from the seminary. One guy introduced himself and said hey, just wanted to check in with you, wanted to make sure you had everything you need. He asked us about if we had coffee and did we find everything. All these things he was doing, straightening stuff and getting things for us. A few minutes later, I said tell me about your role here at the seminary. He said I'm actually the new president. That guy is a leader. Because he loves people and serves people. You could tell it in five minutes the difference between someone who was really submitted to Christ and really able to love other people.

Being a good leader is not primarily dependent on your ability to lead, but your ability to follow Jesus. I'm not saying leadership qualities and skills are not important. By all means get those – they are practical and helpful. But if you don't follow Jesus they will no make any difference. If you do follow Jesus it will take you along ways to being a good leader.

I want to go back to that example of the gondola. This is a picture of Mt. Cermis in Italy near the Italian ski resort of Cavalese. In 1976 a group of 44 people got on a gondola there on March 9 thinking it was going to be an ordinary trip like every other of the thousands of trips that had been taken. As these people began their journey something terrible went wrong. The cable car broke free. It fell 660 feet down the mountainside before coming to a halt in a grassy meadow. The three ton carriage assembly fell on top of it and completely crushed the cabin. Of the 44 people, 43 were killed with a 14-year-old survivor. It was the worst disaster in the history of gondola ski lifts.

When they did the inquest and research to find out what had happened they found two steel cables had been touching one another for some time, and because of the way they were touching, eventually it severed and the severing led to the cable car falling to the bottom of the valley.

There is a disaster that happens to leaders when they lose their connection to the source of their power. Jesus Himself says it in verse 12. "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled." Not if,

but when, you will be humbled.

If you are controlling others; if you are seeking your own self-interest in relationships; if you find yourself leading in other ways against what Christ would provide; if you are not connected to Him it is not a question of if you will have a leadership disaster it is a question of when. When we lose the connection to the power we no longer have the power. Leadership is ultimately not up to us. It is up to Christ through us.

Today, I want to ask you are you really connected to Christ? There is nothing more important to your leadership. I mentioned last week, that I heard a message coming back on a trip about leadership. One of the most convicting things is the idea of am I really leading through and out of my relationship with Jesus Christ? I have to admit, it is so easy for me to coast. It is so easy for me to say I love to follow the rules. I am not going to rob a bank today. I am not going to hit my wife or yell at my coworkers. It is easy to coast and do the things I think I am supposed to do but I lost my connection to Jesus. I lost the real power; the real energy of leadership; the type of leadership that can lovingly influence people to pursue God's vision. That doesn't come from coasting. That doesn't come from being on autopilot. You will not see that in your marriage by trying to be nice at home. You are not going to see that with your kids when you help them with their homework and went to their sports games. Are you really investing through the power of Jesus Christ, hoping to see God transform them into warriors who will fight the battles God has them to fight? That is the kind of leadership we ultimately have as men. We don't get that in our own strength. We only get that by our connection to Jesus Christ.

What is leadership? Lovingly influencing people to pursue God's vision. How do we get there? By staying connected to Christ, staying submitted to Him, and loving others.

If you find yourself today controlling, self-oriented in relationships and situations, repent. Jesus has so much more for you. When we abandon ourselves to Him He shows us what are hearts are really made for. We have new freedom and power and energy that we never imagined we could have, but it comes by repenting and abandoning ourselves. We need to experience His love and grace so we can truly love and serve others. That is how we influence people to pursue God's vision and that is how God gets the glory. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I thank You this morning for how Your Word speaks so clearly to us as men. I think about in my own life how often I am controlling of others; how often I believed I got the right answer and if only they would recognize that how much better that would be. Lord, how often I look for my own self-interests. I think I need to get things my way. I am just selfish so many times. I see how that so negatively impacts my leadership. I pray You would bring me to that place of repentance, and remember how desperate I am for you. That I would not be like a gondola and think I can go wherever I want; that I would know I need to be connected to you.

I pray I would submit and I would believe You are my leader; You are the one in control; You do have my best interests at heart; that I can trust You. I pray You would help me believe you are great, mighty and powerful, and that Your agenda is the thing that my heart would be most satisfied with. I pray I would really believe that today that I would be able to love my wife and

kids out of that freedom, and serve the people I work with, and my neighbors and my friends, because of the love I feel and I know that I experience from You.

Lord, I pray that for these men in this room as well. The relationships and opportunities you give them. Literally, thousands and tens of thousands are going to be influenced by the men in this room, and hundreds of thousand of people will be influenced from the men watching this on the Internet. Lord, will you give us a vision of leadership that we can lovingly influence people to pursue Your vision in a way that brings transformation, revival, and brings You glory. We pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.